



Senator Sheila Kuehl

23rd District
Newsletter
November 2005

Pacific Coast Highway Task Force Reconvened In Wake of Accidents

By Laurie Newman

The 23rd Senate District Task Force on Pacific Coast Highway, first convened in 1998, was reconvened in October of this year in order to discuss plans for making PCH safer for cyclists and pedestrians. In light of the recent accident that occurred on September 10, 2005, on PCH in Malibu, in which two cyclists were struck by a catering truck and killed, Senator Kuehl wanted to look carefully at ways in which the State might improve safety conditions for cyclists and pedestrians along our coastal route.

At the time of the accident, the cyclists, Stanislav Ionov of Calabasas and Scott Bleifer of Santa Monica, were riding along PCH, side by side, in a traffic lane, because there was a construction-related K-rail on the fog line between the roadway. Both men lived in the 23rd State Senate District and were avid, experienced cyclists. Their families and friends lost two vibrant young men.

PCH was designated an official state bicycle route in 1990 by the state legislature. However, there are currently a number of concerns that the State Department of Transportation and law enforcement may not be doing all they can to make it safer on PCH between Santa Monica and the Ventura County line, all of which lies in the 23rd State Senate District.

The meeting of the PCH Task Force--which is made up of representatives from Caltrans, every agency that has any responsibility for PCH, four law enforcement agencies, safety officials, local residents and elected officials from LA, Malibu, Santa Monica and Topanga--met with transportation professionals who work on bicycle issues as well as representatives from the local bicycle community. Signage, road and shoulder maintenance, permitting practices, and enforcement were among the primary issues of concern at the meeting.

The PCH Task Force has been successful in bringing people together and improving communication between all the agencies that have responsibility for some portion of PCH in the 23rd State Senate District. Caltrans has been a true partner in this ongoing effort and we are asking the agency to explore how it can make changes that will make the roadway safer for all users of the state highway. We always have to keep in mind the various ways in which PCH is utilized—as a main artery, as a scenic coastal route, as a main street for the City of Malibu, and as a route for cyclists. Whatever PCH means to you, keep in mind that it's very fragile and that we need to preserve and protect it for all its users.

Laurie Newman is Senator Kuehl's Senior District Field Deputy.

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Local Firefighters Praised In the Wake of the September Blaze

By Laura Plotkin

I was vacationing in New York last month, and decided to take a brief dip into the real world at the end of two weeks of perfect R&R. I turned on the TV in my hotel room and there was the face of our own LA County Supervisor Zev Yaroslavsky on CNN with a picture of the mountains in our district in flames behind him. He was extolling the partnership of our local fire agencies in combating the blaze, saving lives and property, and setting the kind of example of preparation and cooperation that other areas of the country would do well to emulate.

The fire, known as the Topanga fire, which actually started in Chatsworth around North Topanga Canyon Boulevard and the 118 Freeway, burned 24,000 acres over 3 days. The blaze was concentrated south of the 118 Freeway, north of the 101 Freeway, and west of Topanga Canyon Boulevard and stopped about 3/10 of a mile from Las Virgenes Road and the 101 Freeway. Most of the fire was in Ventura County but it traveled along the LA County/Ventura County line and the LA City line. There were successful evacuations of all threatened communities including areas in the City of LA, Chatsworth, Bell Canyon, Brown Canyon, Oak Park, Agoura Hills, Mt. Calabasas, and Mountainview Estates. It burned almost all of the Ahmanson Ranch property, but, due to the excellent work of Joe Edmiston and the MRCA firefighting crew, the Ranch House was saved as was the one on their Sage Ranch property.

Several structures on the Rocketdyne/Boeing property and three homes in Box Canyon in Ventura County were lost in the fire. Thanks to the training and cooperation of the unified command, consisting of the City of LA, the Fire Departments of LA and Ventura Counties, and the California Department of Forestry, aided by LAPD and LA and Ventura County Sheriffs

Departments, the US Forest Service and the National Park Service, there were no fatalities and there was very little property damage or loss of infrastructure. Successful evacuations of large animals, primarily horses, by city and county animal shelters, to sites such as Pierce College, were organized and executed with the help of citizen-volunteers of the Equine Response Team (activated by LA County Animal Care and Control).

Water resource protection and management experts are already at work to mitigate the debris and mudflows that will no doubt beleaguer us in the coming months, but for now, it seems appropriate just to take a moment to thank and honor those who did such a great job protecting us. All in all, 2,000 homes were saved and there were no fatalities. In local ceremonies, firefighters were honored for their amazing skill and talent in containing the blaze and their ongoing efforts to

keep us safe from the fires that are part of our ecosystem's burn cycle. They all make us proud.

Laura Plotkin is Senator Kuehl's District Director.



Los Angeles City Councilmember Greig Smith honors firefighters at an event in October. *Photo courtesy of the City of Los Angeles.*



Edmiston scouting the fire from Lasky Mesa. *Photo courtesy of Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy.*

Keeping Homes Safe from Fires

By Senator Sheila Kuehl

Across California, homeowners have begun to get the message that there are ways to help make their homes safer from wildland fires, but this has not always been the case. After the devastating San Diego fires in 2003, the Los Angeles Times reported that hundreds of the 3,000 homes that were destroyed had flammable vegetation and brush within 30 feet, which, at the time, was the amount of brush clearance required by state law. A bipartisan team of experts, convened by Governor Davis and, later, Governor Schwarzenegger, focused attention, in part, on the problem of flammable fuels in proximity to houses. After the release of the Blue Ribbon report, a number of proposals were introduced in the legislature. One would have required homeowners literally to remove every kind of vegetation from 300 feet around their homes without regard to whether they even owned that much property. It seemed that a useful, but not overly burdensome, solution was needed.

One of my responsibilities in Sacramento is to serve as the chair of the Senate Natural Resources and Water Committee, the committee with jurisdiction over many public resource issues, including state fire policy. I decided to introduce legislation dealing with the issues of wildland fires and home safety. The major provision of that bill, SB 1369, extended the brush clearance requirement from 30 feet to 100 feet. I knew the extension, if enacted into law, would be controversial in some quarters, but I also knew that it was the distance that fire scientists supported and that, if enacted, it could possibly save lives and homes. The bill was signed by the Governor and is now the law of the state.

In some parts of southern California, a clearance requirement of 100 feet is not a big deal, because local city or county ordinances already go beyond 100 feet and establish zones with less stringent brush removal requirements as the distance from the house increases. But in other parts of the state, homeowners were worried that the new requirement would require them to denude their landscape or remove prized plantings.

Those fears have largely been addressed. Local fire departments and the state's Department of Forestry and Fire Protection have worked hard to educate the public about the new clearance requirements, and it now appears that fire departments at the state and local levels have adopted an approach that emphasizes the removal of flammable materials that could spread to houses and that does not require the removal of each and every planting around a home. The important concept is to establish a buffer that

prevents fires from spreading to a home and that allows firefighters to fight a fire from within the buffer.

I'm extremely pleased that homeowners are starting to get the message. In June, a fire in Riverside County destroyed six homes but spared those where homeowners had cleared dead vegetation and brush. "I'm very fortunate. We cleared 100 feet around our house and I'm sure it saved it," said a 73-year homeowner quoted in the Riverside Press-Enterprise.



MCRA firefighters observe the fire from Sage Ranch. Photo courtesy of the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy.

In Los Angeles, after the 16,000-acre fire in Topanga, fire officials said that the brush clearance activities of homeowners helped to control the fire. The Los Angeles Times reported that fires roared into housing developments and then dropped to the ground in the areas where brush had been cleared. Firefighters were able to contain those fires relatively easily. I am very sorry that three homes were lost. Even one would have been a tragedy. We are grateful, however, that thousands of homes were saved. Residents in Topanga and Ventura County were quoted as saying that they had recently removed brush from around their homes, and credited those acts with saving their property.

Of course, brush removal is just one of the tools. New homes can be designed to be fire resistant, and homeowners can do a great deal to retrofit older homes. Fire departments need to enforce the brush clearance restrictions, and private and public landowners need to undertake fuel reduction efforts on their lands. Fire safety in California, where fire is a natural part of the landscape, is a complicated issue, but I'm pleased with the apparent early success of SB 1369.

Governor Signs Six Out of Nine Kuehl Bills

By Jennifer Richard

The Governor signed six out of nine bills that Senator Kuehl sent to his desk this year. These measures will go into effect January 1, 2006. Those successful bills included legislation related to human trafficking, teen parents in foster care, domestic violence restraining orders, Caltrans and migratory fish, domestic partner retirement benefits, and technical changes our natural resources statutes. The three measures the Governor vetoed were all environmental bills.

The Governor signed SB 180, which creates the California Alliance to Combat Trafficking and Slavery (California ACTS) Task Force, to raise public awareness concerning the issue of trafficking and to bring together relevant state agencies, law enforcement, and service providers to improve data collection, prosecution of traffickers, and protection of, and services to, victims of trafficking. SB 180 also requests that the Commission on Peace Officer Standards Training implement training on human trafficking for peace officers in California. "Every year, tens of thousands of men, women, and children are brought against their will to the U.S. to work in sweatshops, farms, personal residences, and the commercial sex trade. California, by virtue of its large manufacturing and service sector industries, global economic strength, and large immigrant population, is a major destination for human trafficking. Human trafficking is modern-day slavery and is becoming one of the most important human rights issues of the 21st century. It was time for California to take serious action," said Senator Kuehl.

The Governor also signed SB 500, which strengthens our foster care system's response to teen parents. "Teen parents who are, themselves, foster children face tremendous odds as they set out to do better than their own parents and to provide their children with a safe, loving, and secure home. All too often these young parents and their babies find themselves caught up in a system which unwittingly inhibits their ability to form a strong and stable family unit," said Senator Kuehl. Specifically, this measure creates a new subset of the existing placement structure for "whole family foster care" placement-- creating family-like placements for

teens and their children, whether or not the baby is the subject of a dependency petition. The measure also removes statutory barriers to receiving federal Title IV-E funds for children who are under the jurisdiction of the dependency court and are living in the same placement as their dependent parent. SB 500 declares that a child whose teen parent is a dependent of the court shall not be found to be at risk of abuse or neglect

solely because of the age, dependent status, or foster care status of the parent. In order to ensure fewer failed placements, the bill calls for caregivers and teen parents to together develop a "Shared Responsibility Plan" aimed at fostering a nurturing and supportive environment for the teen and the baby, and at preventing conflicts and misunderstandings between caregivers and teen parents.

SB 720 was also signed. That measure makes several changes to California's domestic violence restraining order

statutes to enhance the safety of victims of intimate partner violence. These changes reflect several of the recommendations of the Attorney General's Task Force on the Local Criminal Justice Response to Domestic Violence. Specifically, the measure makes the courts responsible for entering Family Court domestic violence restraining orders into the Domestic Violence Restraining Order System (DVROS), just as they are responsible for entering Criminal Protective Orders into DVROS. The bill also authorizes a District Attorney or City Attorney to bring criminal contempt actions for violations of Family Court restraining orders. Finally, the bill clarifies that Criminal Courts have authority to issue stay-away orders.

The two environmental bills of Senator Kuehl's that the Governor did sign were SB 857 and SB 1110. SB 857 prevents Caltrans from creating further barriers to the passage of migratory fish such as salmon when it constructs transportation projects. It also requires an annual report on Caltrans' mitigation activities regarding existing barriers to fish migration. The other measure, SB 1110, is a non-controversial committee bill that makes technical changes to our natural resource statutes.

Finally, the Governor signed SB 973 which provides a process for government employees who retired prior to the enactment of major domestic partner legislation to

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Senator Kuehl Named 2005 Multiple Sclerosis California Action Network Legislator of the Year

By Emily Gold

Senator Sheila Kuehl was recognized as the 2005 Multiple Sclerosis California Action Network (MSCAN) Legislator of the Year at the Southern California Chapter's 58th Annual Meeting, "Accelerating the Pace to Discovery," on Sunday, October 23rd in Los Angeles. Senator Kuehl was presented with the award by Kathy Lander, a volunteer with the National MS Society, who praised Senator Kuehl for her "dedication to improving our healthcare system, as well as her leadership positions on key committees." Ms. Lander also mentioned Senator Kuehl's leadership in authoring California's landmark Family Medical Leave Act, an MSCAN priority bill in 2002, which provides up to six weeks of partially paid leave to care for a seriously ill family member.

"Senator Kuehl has been an outspoken advocate for civil rights and disability rights and shepherded laws that include establishing nurse to patient ratios in every hospital in California," added Ms. Lander who concluded her remarks by noting, "most importantly, right now she is working tirelessly to provide a health care system that provides access to decent healthcare for all Californians by establishing universal health coverage through a single payer system."

For 59 years, the Southern California Chapter of the National MS Society has worked to improve the quality of life for the 70,000 people touched by MS in Los Angeles, Riverside, San Bernardino, Kern and Inyo counties. The mission of the National MS Society is



Senator Kuehl accepting her award from National MS Society Southern California Chapter President Leon LeBuffe and volunteer Kathy Lander.

dedicated to ending the devastating effects of multiple sclerosis. The Southern California Chapter carries out the Society's mission by acting as an information and referral resource, providing programs and services for people with MS and their families, and through support of research into the cause and cure of MS.

More information about the work and services of the MS Society can be found at www.nmss.org.

Emily Gold is a District Field Representative.

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elect survivor continuance for their domestic partners. The measure also clarifies that a conservatee has the same right to enter into a domestic partnership as s/he does to enter into a marriage.

The Governor also vetoed three environmental measures authored by Senator Kuehl, SB 658, SB 744, and SB 820. SB 820 was a major piece of water legislation that would have strengthened water conservation policy, reduced uncertainty about the use and abundance of our water resources by providing critical information on groundwater use, and increased the integrity and integration of water resources planning

and management. SB 658 would have created a voluntary, opt-in program for coastal and San Francisco Bay Area counties in order to generate a reliable funding source for mitigating the effects of motor vehicles and their related infrastructure on the environment. SB 744 would have provided easier public access to timber harvest plans by requiring the State Board of Forestry and Fire Protection to make them available on the internet, thus enhancing public participation in important natural resource management decisions.

Jennifer Richard is Senator Kuehl's Legislative Director.

PUC Decides to Adopt Area Code 310/424 Overlay

By Anne Neville and Laurie Newman

On August 25th, the California Public Utilities Commission (PUC) approved an area code overlay for the 310 area code, a decision they had been considering over a number of years. According to the PUC, the supply of phone numbers in the 310 area code has been steadily decreasing and, several years ago, they began recommending either splitting the 310 area code or adopting a new area code number as an overlay. After requests from legislators to conserve and reuse numbers, inventory was improved so that the decision to overlay the 310 area code was deferred. However, in 2000, the PUC adopted a potential back-up plan that included splitting-up the 310 area code region. Had this been implemented, the Imperial Highway would have become the dividing line for the 310 region, and those in the new area code, 424, would have been required to change their numbers. In the overlay plan adopted by the PUC, instead of the split, the current 310 region will have two area codes: 310 and 424. Unlike an area code split, in an overlay plan, no one will be forced to change an existing phone number, though consumers requesting additional lines in a residence or business may be assigned a 424 area code for the new number. Of greatest concern to those in the 310 area code, however, is the fact that, beginning July 26, 2006, all customers within the 310/424 region will have to dial "1", the area code, and then the seven digit number to connect their calls. Residents will be allowed to begin reprogramming their phone memory to use this method as early as December 31, 2005.

Many of the residents of the 23rd Senate District expressed a strong preference for a split because, under such a system, they would not need to dial 11 digits to reach another 310 number. However, the PUC chose to adopt an overlay plan, indicating that they considered such a plan less disruptive for businesses as well as for current customers south of the Imperial Highway who would have been assigned the new area code and, thus, have to print new stationery, business cards, etc.

To implement the change, the PUC is overseeing a widespread information campaign. All affected phone companies will work with the PUC and are responsible for sending out notices to their customers. All owners of apartment buildings and condos will be notified that if they have security call boxes at the front of their building, those systems may need to be replaced or reprogrammed so that they can accept 11 digit dialing. Notices from the phone companies should arrive next month.

Adoption of the 310/424 overlay represents the first time that California has used this method to confront the geometrically spiraling demand for telephone numbers. Previously, when the existing supply of numbers in an area code ran low, the area was split along geographic boundaries. Prior to 1991, all of 213, 310, and 562 were part of the 213 area code. In 1991, the 310 was created, and after supply dwindled for 310 numbers, in 1997, the area code was split once again, and area code 562 was created.

The PUC's revised plan was prompted by a group of telecommunications providers (T-Mobile, Nextel of California, Verizon Wireless, Verizon California, Inc., Sprint, Cingular Wireless, and SBC) who filed a petition for modification of the original 2000 decision. The PUC was established in 1911, and now regulates all privately owned telecommunications, electric, natural gas, water, rail, and moving companies in California. Five commissioners, who are gubernatorial appointees serving six year terms, formulate and vote on all decisions before the Commission. The PUC welcomes public involvement. To find out how to express your opinion, contact the Office of the Public Advisor at 1-866-849-8390 or public.advisor@cpuc.ca.gov.

For more information about the 310/424 area code overlay, see:
<http://www.cpuc.ca.gov/static/telco/reports/area+code+info/ac310pubmtgs/index.htm>

Anne Neville is a Sacramento Legislative Aide and Laurie Newman is a Senior District Field Representative.

23rd Senate District. *The 23rd Senate District includes the cities of Agoura Hills, Beverly Hills, Calabasas, Hidden Hills, Malibu, Oxnard, Port Hueneme, Santa Monica, West Hollywood and Westlake Village and the communities of Bel Air, Brentwood, Canoga Park, Encino, Hollywood, Mt. Olympus, Pacific Palisades, Sherman Oaks, Studio City, Tarzana, Topanga, West Los Angeles, West Hills, Westwood and Woodland Hills.*



Three High School Students Attend Sacramento Women in Politics Program

By Hilda Garcia

The 23rd State Senatorial district was chosen by Sacramento's Capitol Network organization to send three high school girls to the Capitol for a forum titled "Women in Politics". The program is organized by Capitol Focus, a nonprofit, non-partisan project that works to engage students in public policy and state politics. Since 1982, more than 15,000 youth from all parts of the state have participated in Capitol Focus programs. This past summer, Andrea Casas, Maritza Manjarrz, and Jeyrica Porras, all from Santa Monica, had the opportunity to attend this program. They had

lively interactive sessions with professionals representing the legislative and executive branches, lobbying organizations, and the media. They participated in examining contrasting perspectives on twenty statewide issues, conducted mock legislative hearings, and then cast votes on the subjects. The overall goal of the Capitol Focus program is to develop enthusiasm for the democratic process, along with the knowledge, confidence, and skills necessary for effective participation in the political system. We congratulate our participants.

Hilda Garcia is a District Field Deputy.

Senator Kuehl's Committee Assignments

Senator Kuehl sits on the following Senate Committees:

Standing Committees:

- ◆ Natural Resources and Water (Chair)
- ◆ Budget and Fiscal Review
- ◆ Environmental Quality
- ◆ Government Modernization, Efficiency and Accountability
- ◆ Health
- ◆ Judiciary
- ◆ Labor and Industrial Relations
- ◆ Local Government

Subcommittees:

- ◆ Budget - Subcommittee No. 2 on Resources and Environment (Chair)
- ◆ Health - Aging & Long Term Care
- ◆ Health - Stem Cell Research Oversight
- ◆ Natural Resources & Water – Delta Resources

Select Committees:

- ◆ School Safety (Chair)
- ◆ Health Insurance Crisis in California (Chair)
- ◆ California Correctional System
- ◆ Developmental Disabilities & Mental Health
- ◆ Perchlorate Contamination



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